


# In Hot Pursuit of Language in Prehistory

Essays in the four fields  
of anthropology

Edited by John D. Bengtson



John Benjamins Publishing Company

## In Hot Pursuit of Language in Prehistory



# **In Hot Pursuit of Language in Prehistory**

Essays in the four fields of anthropology

In honor of Harold Crane Fleming

*Edited by*

John D. Bengtson

John Benjamins Publishing Company

Amsterdam / Philadelphia



<sup>TM</sup> The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences – Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

In hot pursuit of language in prehistory : essays in the four fields of anthropology in honor of Harold Crane Fleming / edited by John D. Bengtson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Comparative linguistics. 2. Language and languages--Origin. 3. Human beings--Origin. I. Bengtson, John D.

P143.I36 2008

306.44--dc22

2008030839

ISBN 978 90 272 3252 6 (Hb; alk. paper)

© 2008 – John Benjamins B.V.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, photoprint, microfilm, or any other means, without written permission from the publisher.

John Benjamins Publishing Co. · P.O. Box 36224 · 1020 ME Amsterdam · The Netherlands  
John Benjamins North America · P.O. Box 27519 · Philadelphia PA 19118-0519 · USA

# Table of contents

Foreword	IX
Acknowledgments	XIII
Photographs	XV
Works of Harold Crane Fleming	XIX
 <b>Part I. African peoples</b>	
Geography, selected Afro-Asiatic families, and Y chromosome lineage variation: An exploration in linguistics and phylogeography	3
<i>Shomarka Omar Keita</i>	
A dental anthropological hypothesis relating to the ethnogenesis, origin, and antiquity of the Afro-Asiatic language family: Peopling of the Eurafrican-South Asian triangle IV	17
<i>Christy G. Turner II</i>	
African weeks	25
<i>Daniel F. McCall</i>	
 <b>Part II. African languages – Synchronic studies</b>	
Gender distinction and affirmative copula clauses in Zargulla	39
<i>Azeb Amha</i>	
Riddling in Gidole	49
<i>Paul Black</i>	
 <b>Part III. African languages – Classification and prehistory</b>	
A lexicostatistical comparison of Omotic languages	57
<i>Václav Blažek</i>	
The primary branches of Cushitic: Seriating the diagnostic sound change rules	149
<i>Christopher Ehret</i>	

Erosion in Chadic <i>Herrmann Jungraithmayr</i>	161
On Kunama <i>ukunkula</i> “elbow” and its proposed cognates in Nilo-Saharan languages <i>Philippe Bürgisser</i>	169
The problem of pan-African roots <i>Roger M. Blench</i>	189
<b>Part IV. Languages of Eurasia, Oceania, and the Americas</b>	
Some thoughts on the Proto-Indo-European cardinal numbers <i>Allan R. Bomhard</i>	213
Some Old World experience of linguistic dating <i>J.A. Janhunen</i>	223
The languages of Northern Eurasia: Inference to the best explanation <i>John D. Bengtson</i>	241
Slaying the Dragon across Eurasia <i>Michael Witzel</i>	263
Trombetti: The forefather of Indo-Pacific <i>Jonathan Morris</i>	287
Otomanguean loan words in Proto-Uto-Aztecan maize vocabulary? <i>Jane H. Hill</i>	309
Historical interpretations of geographical distributions of Amerind subfamilies <i>Larry Lepionka</i>	321
<b>Part V. Human origins, Language origins, and Proto-Sapiens language</b>	
Current topics in human evolutionary genetics <i>Stephen L. Zegura</i>	343
A wild 50,000-year ride <i>Philip Lieberman</i>	359
Can Paleolithic stone artifacts serve as evidence for prehistoric language? <i>Ofer Bar-Yosef</i>	373

The origin of language: Symbiosism and symbiomism <i>George van Driem</i>	381
Some speculations on the evolution of language, and the language of evolution <i>Paul Whitehouse</i>	401
The age of Mama and Papa <i>Alain Matthey de l'Etang &amp; Pierre J. Bancel</i>	417
The millennial persistence of Indo-European and Eurasianic pronouns and the origin of nominals <i>Pierre J. Bancel &amp; Alain Matthey de l'Etang</i>	439
<b>General index</b>	465
<b>Index of languages and language families</b>	471
<b>Index of scholars discussed</b>	475



# Slaying the dragon across Eurasia

Michael Witzel

Harvard University and President,  
Association for the Study of Language in Prehistory

Myths relating the slaying of a large reptile by a hero or trickster deity appear in many mythologies across Eurasia and beyond, in Polynesia and the Americas. They are an important part of the creation myths. The killing of the monster liberates the dammed up waters as to make the world fertile and inhabitable for humans. Related is the connection between summer solstice and the marriage of the dragon slayer (or a hunter) with a local virgin, ultimately, the marriage of sun and moon, as found from Old India via China and Japan to the Kekchi Mayas. Such myths are traced back to a reconstructed Late Paleolithic mythology, called "Laurasian" that incorporates myths from the beginning of the world to its final destruction. Historical Comparative Mythology is to be added as another approach in our quest to understand early humans.

**Keywords:** dragon slaying; Eurasia; Americas; Summer solstice; marriage of Sun and Moon

## 1. Introduction

Myths<sup>1</sup> all over the globe exhibit certain similarities that have attracted the attention of modern scholars for some hundred and fifty years. In any attempt to explain the early history of anatomically modern humans, comparative mythology would be expected to add important aspects, however, research along these lines has hardly been

---

1. A brief definition of myth may run like this: Myths are highly regarded, more or less standardized, non-secular tales dealing with questions of the origin, nature and ultimate destiny of the world and its human beings, including those of their societies, rituals and festivals. There are many other formulations; however, a very comprehensive and useful definition has recently been given by W. van Binsbergen, Paper at the Conference "Myth and the disciplines" at Leiden, Dec.12, 2003, see: [http://www.shikanda.net/ancient\\_models/leopard/leopardwww.htm](http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/leopard/leopardwww.htm), <http://www.shikanda.net/topicalities/kyoto/kyoto.htm>.

carried out so far. This is not surprising as records of myths go back only some 5,000 years and most have been recorded in much more recent times.

Whenever myths have indeed been compared on a larger scale it was based on preconceived notions of interpretation.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, myths have been studied for a long time,<sup>3</sup> ever since the times of the ancient Greeks, Indians and Chinese, and in the modern Occident for at least some 330 years.<sup>4</sup> However, such studies, comparative or otherwise, have not yet yielded a cogent system of relationships.<sup>5</sup> There are several ways to explain such wide-ranging similarities.<sup>6</sup>

However, earlier types of explanations of myth proposed so far<sup>7</sup> fail to address the central, but generally *unnoticed* problem: the comparability of *whole systems of myths*; in other words, to use a linguistic simile, the comparison of *whole grammars*, not just of a particular word, form, declension/conjugation or syntactical feature. When actually comparing whole systems of myths it can be noticed – though not explored so far – that local mythologies, such as the Vedic Indian, Japanese, Icelandic or Maya ones, not only have similar contents (individual myths with similar motifs), but that these items are also *arranged* in similar fashion. In exploring this feature I do not compare randomly from mythologies all over the world, but only from those that

---

2. Such as the two most current ones of diffusion (Frobenius, Baumann, etc.), common underlying features of the human mind (Jung, Campbell; also, though more limited in geographical space, Lévi-Strauss's binary systems), etc. Diffusion entails that the similarities in widely distributed myths are due to a gradual dispersion of such motifs from a known or reconstructed center. The other current theory, of common universal traits of the human psyche, is based on C.G. Jung's psychology (followed by J. Campbell and others): certain motifs, or their composite parts (archetypes) are *universal* and can appear in dreams, visions and myths, and can re-emerge at any time.

3. See Doty 1986, 2000.

4. See Feldman & Richardson 1972; and cf. Matsumura 2005.

5. See however, my recent proposal of the Laurasian and Gondwana mythological regions in some previous papers: *Zinbun* (1990), *MT* VI, 2001, 45–62; *EJVS* 12 (2005); *Out of Africa: The journey of the oldest tales of humankind*. Conference Presentation at the *Conference on Generalized Sciences: Peaceful World and Enriching Lives*, Tokyo March 17, 2005; *ESCA* 7: 2006: 284–318; a longer version of the present paper, including a detailed analysis of aspects of the summer solstice, was given at Nanhua University, Taiwan, Oct. 2005. The proposals will be detailed my forthcoming book, *Origins* (working title).

6. There is a long list of interpretations of myth, from the Classical and Renaissance stance (Vico) regarding them as allegorical or euhemeristic, from Max Müller's disguised nature myths to astral mythology, from ritual to Malinowski's social charter, from Freud's theories of repression to Jung's universal psychic archetypes, from myth as disguised history to Lévi-Strauss' binary, structural analysis supposedly reflecting the structure of the human mind.

7. See W. Doty 1986, 2000.

follow a *certain narrational scheme*. Indeed, a fairly large number of them exhibit a *common story line*, that I call Laurasian, after the geological name of the early northern supercontinent.

This narrative scheme encompasses, in succession, the ultimate origins of the universe and the world, the subsequent generations of the gods, an age of semi-divine heroes, the emergence of humans, and the origins of (noble) lineages. It frequently includes a violent end to our present world, sometimes with the hope for a new world emerging out of the ashes. Ultimately, the universe is seen as a living body, in analogy to the human one: it is born from primordial incest, grows, develops, comes of age, and has to undergo final decay and death.

The new approach, of historical comparative mythology, has been proposed earlier (*Mother Tongue* VI, 2001: 45–62).<sup>8</sup> It has recently, though unwittingly, been called “essentially romantic”<sup>9</sup> as it looks for, and points toward, a *common source*, that certainly “may no longer exist,” as William Jones put it in 1786 with regard to the Proto-Indo-European parent language. Indeed, as pointed out in *MT* VI, this new approach, and the steps taken, are similar to the well tested methods of historical (and long range) linguistics.

In the present paper, a certain type of myth, the slaying of the dragon, will be explored in some detail. It belongs to the important series of creation myths that has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

---

8. See further Witzel 2005; Witzel, M. Out of Africa: The journey of the oldest tales of human-kind, given at the *Conference on Generalized Sciences: Peaceful World and enriching Lives*, Tokyo March 17, 2005; forthcoming book, *Origins* (working title).

9. As W. Doniger chose to call it in *The New York Times Book Review* (July 14, 1991: 3, 26): “Given cultural convergences the theoretically possible explanations are: (a) diffusion, (b) derivation from a common source (c) derivation from structural characteristics of the human mind. [Ginsburg] rejects the idea of a common source because he rejects a model which is Romantic even before it is positivist: that of the genealogical tree.” However it is precisely this model that has been successfully used by comparative historical linguistics, palaeontology, and – visible in popular accounts since the Fall of 1990 – in the very influential genetic studies (cf. Witzel 2001). Incidentally, in her review, Doniger had many of the facts in hand that would have allowed her to observe the opposition between Eurasian (Laurasian) and sub-Saharan African (Gondwana) mythology, but due to the engrained “path dependencies” of the psychological interpretation, from Freud onwards, she failed to draw the obvious conclusions discussed in this and earlier papers. Recent advances in human genetics lend additional support to this scenario; such results (especially the early, Paleolithic emigration from Africa along the coasts of the Indian/W. Pacific Oceans) will be dealt with separately (Witzel, *Origins*: working title).

10. Witzel 2006.

## 2. The dragon

The dragon in the form of a giant lizard-like creature or as a giant snake enjoys a worldwide spread (S. Thompson, 1932–6: Motif B11).<sup>11</sup> This spread has usually been explained by diffusion (Smith 1919) or by archetypes (C.G. Jung), see above. However, Blust (2000: 520) provides a survey of its typical traits. He believes that dragon ideas “arose through processes of reasoning which do not differ essentially from those underlying modern scientific explanations.” He traces this back, ultimately, to the observation of rainbows.<sup>12</sup> Though this natural phenomenon has been interpreted as a giant snake by the peoples of many areas (Sub-Saharan Africa, South America, Australia), it will be seen that the reptilian<sup>13</sup> form that (mostly) possesses legs and that is found in large areas of Eurasia, is of a different nature. In the perspective of Laurasian mythology, its appearance in “mythological history” is tied to a particular stage in creation myths.

After the initial creation of the universe, of the earth, and of light and sunshine,<sup>14</sup> the new earth is not yet ready for living beings. It has to receive moisture, whether (sweet) water or the blood of a primordial creature. In many traditions, it is the latter. Only after the earth has been fertilized by the Dragon’s blood it can support life.

---

11. In some detail: B 11: data from Europe, India, Korea; B11.1. Origin of the dragon (e.g., from worm); B11.2. Form of dragon; B11.2.1. Dragon as compound animal (Europe, China, Egypt); B11.2.1.1. Dragon as modified serpent (Amerindian, Japanese, Indian) or fish (China); B11.2.3. Many-headed dragon (Europe, Iran, Indian; Japan, S. America: Araucanian; Africa: Fulah; B11.2.11. Fire-breathing dragon; B11.6. Deeds of dragons; B11.7. Dragon as rain-spirit (China) or bringing water (India, Japan); B16.6. Giant devastating serpent, cf. R111.1.3. Rescue of princess (maiden) from dragon; B11.11. Fight with dragon (Europe, Egypt, Iran, China, Japan; Africa (Fang); (cf. A531. Culture hero overcomes monsters); cf. also B15.1.2.2.– B11.2.3.1/B15.1.2.8.1. Three-to Nine-headed dragons. B11.7. Dragon as rain-spirit; A1111. Impounded water: Water is kept by monster so that mankind cannot use it. A hero defeats the monster and releases the water (worldwide). Also: A876. Midgard Serpent; B91.1. Naga. Serpent demon; B91.2. Plumed serpent; A139.3. Dragon god; A132.1. Snake-god. – It has to be noted that S. Thompson’s data are confined, by and large, to Eurasia and the Americas.

12. Barber & Barber (2004: 232–244), too, explain the dragon, somewhat simplistically, as derived from certain features observed in nature, however, mostly those of northwestern Europe. They do not include a worldwide survey such as done by Blust 2000.

13. It has scales in all areas surveyed by Blust 2000: 520 (Europe, Near East and Egypt, India, Far East, Mesoamerica, North America); however, apparently not in S. America (but note a many-headed dragon with the Araucanians, Thompson 1932–6: Motif B11.2.3.1); see further below, at the end.

14. See M. Witzel 2005: *Vala and Iwato*.

Frequently, (Father) Heaven and (Mother) Earth are the primordial deities. Their children are, e.g., the Greek Titans, Indian Asuras or Jpn. *Kuni.no Kami* ("mundane gods"). The latter's younger and victorious cousins are the Olympian gods, the Indian Devas or the Jpn. *Ama.no Kami* ("heavenly gods"); their older cousins are regarded as enemies or monsters who have to be slain or at least be subdued temporarily.

Most prominent among such fights is the slaying of the primordial Dragon by the Great Hero, a descendant of Father Heaven. In the Vedic texts of early India, it is the great god Indra who kills the three-headed reptile, just like his Iranian counterpart Thraëtaona (Avesta texts) kills the three-headed dragon, or as their distant equivalent in old Japan, the god Susa.no Wo (Kojiki, Nihon Shoki), kills the "eight-forked" dragon, *Yamata.no Orochi*.<sup>15</sup>

The same is echoed at the other end of Eurasia. In England, it is Beowulf, in the Icelandic Edda it is Sigurd (the Siegfried of Wagner's opera and of the medieval Nibelungen Epic) who perform the heroic feat of slaying the "worm."<sup>16</sup> We may also compare Herakles' killing of the Hydra of Lerna. Herakles is the mortal son of the king of the Olympian gods, Zeus. In his famous 12 deeds, Herakles not only kills various monsters but he also finds the cows, or dawns (§ 5): in other words, he acts just like the Vedic Indra.

Closely related to the latter is the Slavic myth of the hero's fight with *Veles*. His name reflects the Avestan *Vara*, Vedic *Vala*, both of which are terms for an underground fortress or cave that contains the "cows" (dawns), the sun and moon as well as the goods desired by humans. (In the Nuristani myths of NE Afghanistan, it is called "the house near heaven"). The dichotomy between Slav. *Veles* (Lithuanian *Vėlinas*, *Vėlnias*; Latvian *Vēls*) and *Perun* (Lith. *Perkūnas*, Puhvel 1987: 226 sq) is still seen in place names, even in such relatively late Slavicized areas as Dalmatia (Katičić 2001).

The Indo-European myths have recently been studied by C. Watkins (1995)<sup>17</sup> and to some extent by Barber and Barber (2004: 232–244).<sup>18</sup>

---

15. In Japan (and to some extent in Polynesia), 8 is the preferred number in enumerative systems, while it is 9 in northern (shamanic) Eurasia and China, and 7 in the Greater Near East: interesting regional features that need further exploration.

16. As the dragon is called in Germanic languages. We may also compare Thor's and Tyr's killing of the giants.

17. Many Indo-European comparisons (especially Slavic ones) have been made by Ivanov and Toporov 1970, 1974.

18. They find simple explanations, based on the experience of nature. However, they mostly deal with northwestern Indo-European and some Near Eastern dragons but they neglect Indian, Chinese, Japanese and older pre-Occidental ones, such as the well-known chain of transmission of mythemes from Persia > Rome/Byzantium > Germanic tribes (Bächtold-Stäubli 1987: 364–367. s.v. *Drache*). The only exception is their study of some astronomical features in their

Further afield, in ancient Egyptian myth, the victorious sun (Re) each night slays the dragon of the deep (Apophis, “with a knife on his head”), when it passes underground back towards the east as to rise again. Even Apophis’ bones are destroyed; there is total destruction, and not even his shadow is left. In ritual, too, Apophis is burnt daily *in effigie* at dawn and dusk. In Mesopotamia, Marduk’s killing of Tiamat is a related theme. The earliest Chinese mythology has the “black dragon” killed; the dragon was not yet regarded then as a beneficial being, as later on.

There are even echoes as distant as in Hawai’i (*mo’o* monsters), while the myth as such seems absent, *prima facie*, in the Americas. On closer look, however, there are a number of myths that speak of killing various types of ogres, even outside the Na-Dene speaking Athapaskan tribes (Bierhorst 1986: 68) that are more closely related to Siberia. Examples are found among the southern California Chumash (Bierhorst 1986: 94), and as far as the most distant South American tribes, such as those of the Gran Chaco (Wilbert & Simoneau 1987: 703, 729)<sup>19</sup> and of Tierra del Fuego (Campbell 1988: I 2: 256; Wilbert 1975: 39–43; Gusinde 1931: 593–595, 597–599).<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Japan, India, and Iran

To facilitate a closer comparison, individual mythologies are investigated, to begin with, the oldest Japanese texts, *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* (712/720 CE). According to them, the dragon *Yamata.no orochi* lives on the river *Hi* in Izumo,<sup>21</sup> the land assigned to *Susa.no Wo*, originally the lord of the Ocean. He is the son of the primordial parent deities *Izanagi* and *Izanami*. *Nihon Shoki* 1.51 (Aston 1972) says that the dragon in the land of Izumo, on the *Hi* river, “had an eight-forked head and

---

chapter 16. (Barber & Barber 2004: 177–217): The Dragon (*Draco*), the constellation between the two Bears (*Ursa*) was killed or driven off, and center of the world and of the night time sky (north pole) shifted (close) to our present Pole Star, *Polaris*. Cf. Witzel 1984.

19. Monsters: Motif A53: Wilbert & Simoneau no. s 97, 169, 170, killing the vulture, which has many other correspondences, e.g., to Motif B11.7.1+, B16.5.1.2, etc. (Wilbert & Simoneau 1987: 703); cf. also s.v. *snake* (Wilbert & Simoneau 1987: 729, B242+); see also Sullivan (1988: 75): primordial monsters killed (Desana), fish monster (Warao) p. 122, etc.; see index s.v. *monsters*.

20. Note also the seven-headed dragon with the Araucanians, Thompson 1932–6: Motif B11.2.3.

21. Or at *Nihon Shoki* 1.54: on the upper river *Ye* in *Aki* (Hiroshima Prefecture). Note that at *Nihon Shoki* 1.56, *Susa.no Wo* with his son *Iso-takeru* (“fifty courageous”) went down to *Shiragi* (Korea), at *Soshimori* (*mori* = Kor. *moi* “mountain”, Aston); he says “I will not dwell in this land”, takes a clay (!) boat and crosses over to Mt. *Tori-kamu.no Take* at the upper *Hi* river. Then *Susa.no Wo* dwelt on Mt. *Kuma-nari* (Mt. *Kumano* in Izumo? near *Suga*) and finally went to *Hades*. (*Kumanari*: I p. 59, 232; *Kōkuri* = old name *Koma*, 367).

eight-forked tail; his eyes were red like the winter cherry; and on his back firs and cypresses were growing.<sup>22</sup> As it crawled it extended over a space of eight hills and eight valleys,<sup>23</sup> with the typical Jpn. stress of the number eight. Susa.no Wo gets the dragon drunk with Sake, and cuts off one head after another.<sup>24</sup> Tearing him apart, he finds a sword (*kusa-nagi.no tsurugi*) in the dragon's tail which is to become important later on in Japanese myth (and as the sword of the Emperor). The dragon's spilled blood makes earth fertile. Susa.no Wo<sup>25</sup> marries the virgin Kushi-nada Hime whom he had rescued from the dragon, and finally enters the Netherworld (*toko-yo.no kuni*) via Cape Kumano (Nihon Shoki 1.60)

The old Iranian and Vedic Indian myth of slaying the dragon is of Indo-European origin, but it has undergone some local influences, especially in the shared Central Asian homelands of both peoples (Witzel 2000, 2003, 2004). The dragon is the primordial guardian of productive forces or of riches, and the divine Vedic hero Indra or the Iranian heroes Thraētaona (Avesta: Yašt 5. 33–35, Yasna 9. 7–8) or Kərəsāspa (Yt 19. 38–40, Y 9. 11) are his slayers.

It is one of Indra's main deeds to overcome Vṛtra, which originally meant just "resistance" (Benveniste-Renou 1934). He was imagined in IIr. tradition as a dragon or as a giant snake, lying on the primordial mountain or in the ocean. Its dragon form is found in IIr. as \**aǵʰi*, Old Iranian *aži*, Vedic *ahi* "dragon", a three-headed (*tri-śīrṣan/θri-kamərəda*) reptile monster. In Vedic he also appears as the three-headed Viśvarūpa, son of a primordial deity, Tvaṣṭṛ,<sup>26</sup> who is the adoptive father of Indra. When Indra kills the dragon Viśvarūpa, he thus kills his "cousin" (or due to "adoption" by Tvaṣṭṛ, even his step-brother), which clearly reflects the common IIr. dichotomy between the *Deva* and *Asura* deities discussed above. However, there is archaeological evidence for the dragon from Southern Central Asia, an area where the speakers of pre-Vedic and pre-Avestan have passed through (Witzel 2003, 2004).

There are many representations (Francfort 1994) of the dragon in the Bactria-Margiana Archeological Complex (BMAC), an early South-Central Asian Bronze age culture (2400–1600 BCE), an area that the ancestors of the speakers of Old Iranian and Vedic have passed through or even stayed for a while, and where they were deeply

22. Similar description of the 3-headed monster is found in the Avesta.

23. Aston 1972: 55sqq.

24. Cf. myth of Perseus and his killing of the Gorgon Medusa, see Graves 1955, vol. I: 238.

25. His child is Oho-na-muchi.no Kami, Oho-na-muji, Oho-na-mochi, etc (cf. Kojiki 1.10, Philippi 1968: 67), whose beneficial acts include that he "established this sub-celestial world, and created medicines ... and controlled calamities of birds, beasts creeping things ..." (Nihon Shoki 1. 59).

26. Cf. Avesta, Yašt 19.18 *θwōrəštār* as "creator" of Ahura Mazda's creation, cf. Yasna 29.6, Oberlies 2000: 370.

influenced in mythology and ritual (Lubotsky 2001; Witzel 2003, 2004, 2006) (Interaction between the BMAC and steppe peoples is now clearly visible: the BMAC has certain steppe influences, in pottery etc., and the opposite direction of influence is sometimes assumed for the Arkhaim/Sintashta culture<sup>27</sup> in the Urals area.) In the BMAC, the dragon mainly appears as an ugly, scaled, human-headed man standing with a water vessel in one arm (Francfort 1994). In most IIr. descriptions, however, the dragon is seen not in human form but as a giant reptile, killed by the heroes Thraētaona (Yašt 5. 33–35, Yasna 9. 7–8) or Kərəsāspa (Yašt 19. 38–40, Yasna 9. 11), who was resting and cooking on the beast. (cf. Oberlies 2000: 371 sq.). Slight differences of IIr. myth in the Avesta and the Veda must seen within the context of the Avesta that represents the local successor of the BMAC culture. We would then have, in IIr., these epithets of an old Dragon Slayer god (Witzel 2004):

---

### Indo-Iranian

<i>*indra vṛtraghan-</i>	::	<i>*aj'hi (*yaz) vṛtra</i>
“strong slayer of resistance”	::	“dragon, the resistance”

### Vedic /Old IA

Indra	::	Vṛtra, ahi, (*tri-śīrṣan Viśvarūpa RV 10.8.9; 2.11.19, = <i>tri-śīrṣan trikakúd krimi</i> AV 5.23.9) Śuṣṇa, Cumuri (local)
-------	----	--

### Avestan

(Indra), Vərəθragna	::	aži, (Y 9.8 <i>ažim dahākəm θri-kamərədam xšašašim</i> )
(Kərəsāspa, <sup>28</sup>	::	yellowish monster, exuding yellow poison;
cooking a meal in metal pot at noon, Yt 19.38–41)	::	Gaṇdarəβa with yellow heel
(Ātar, son of Ahura Mazdā Yt 19.47)	::	aži Dahāka, θri-kamərəda
(Tištriia Yt 8.13–23: in human, cattle, horse form)	::	Daēuua Apaoša, ka-mərəda, black, bald horse

---

27. For the archeological background of contact between the steppe cultures (such as that of the Indo-Iranians) and the BMAC see Hiebert, Shishlina & Hiebert 1998 and Witzel 2003: 48sqq.

28. Note that his name “having emaciated horses” (Ved. Kṛṣāśva, cf. *kṛśagu, kṛśapaśu*) reflects the situation before the release of the waters; the name would fit Tištriia better. – Note also the stress in Zoroastrian tradition on the miserable situation (cf. Y 51.12) of Zarathustra (“having old camels”?) before he succeeded in gaining some followers.



However, the reptile also appears, with local Indian and Hindukush adaptations, as a giant cobra (*vyāṃsa*, Schmidt 1963) and it is in this area that an overlap with the snake form (*Nāga*) emerges. Even then, these northwestern Nāgas (found in Dardic and Nuristani speaking populations) are, to this day,<sup>29</sup> guardians of water in the form of ice and snow, unlike their tropical Indian forms that are linked to the monsoon rains (Witzel 2004, and forthc.)

In the BMAC, however, the dragon appears as scaled *anthropomorphic* demon of draught who fights the eagle faced hero (Francfort 1994).<sup>30</sup> The Eurasian motifs have evolved into a typical, local variety which has representations in its art of the motifs of the primordial dragon guarding and inhibiting the waters, the dragon-slaying hero, and a divine eagle.

---

Oxus religion :: Indo-Iranian religions

<u>Goddess</u>	<u>anthropomorphic DRAGON</u>
fertility	of drought;
vegetation	then releases waters
<i>Anāhitā?/ Sarasvatī/Rasā</i>	<i>Aži/Ahi / “*Vərəθra”/Vrtra</i>
<i>Aditi, Dezālik</i>	<i>Apaoša</i> (Forssman 1968)
	<i>3-headed (Itr.) : θri-kamərəda/</i>
	<i>tri-šīršan Viśvarūpa</i>

*Vrtra > cobra snake in India : Vyāṃsa*

His children:

*combined forms, anthropomorphic*  
lion/snake ~ *Sēnmurv?* (Schmidt 1980)

FIGHTS WITH THE HERO:

eagle faced<sup>31</sup>  
(*Circaetus Gallicus* “snake eagle”, Avest. *saēna?*), Eagle flies in Winter over the Hindukush (*upairi saēna, upari śyena*); catches and eats snakes;  
Hero in human form: *Vərəθragan/Vrtrahan, Iṇdara/Indra*

---

29. The main river of Nuristan, Lu Nang, is derived from \*Deva Nāga; Kashmirian Nāgas are so described in the local texts Nilamata Purāṇa (8th cent. CE?) and Rājatarāṅgiṇī (1151 CE).

30. Various Old Indo-Aryan and Old Iranian data have been added (in italics) for the sake of comparison.

31. For a detailed example, see the reproduction in *Afghanistan* 2002: 204, of the eagle-faced hero found on a bronze axe, from Daulatab near Balkh, of c. 2000 BCE.

The old Indo-European myth of dragon slaying has been adjusted in the Avesta under the influence of the BMAC and its successor cultures. There is both the killing of the dragon but also Tištriia's fight with the demon of drought, Apaoša, and the generation of clouds and rain, reflecting what Francfort has reconstructed for the BMAC belief system. Even in the Ṛgveda, Indra is not just the dragon slayer but is also closely connected with the release of the waters. The Ṛgvedic giant cobra, *vyamisa*, surrounds the waters and must be killed (at least temporarily) to let them flow. This is more of an Afghanistan and Indus myth (Falk 1997) than a monsoon myth (Vajracharya 1997). In Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Panjab, the penned up waters, encapsulated by (the \**Nāgas* of) snow and ice, are released by the snow melt, resulting in the late spring/summer floods so prominent in the Avestan and Ṛgvedic texts (Falk 1997).

The Indo-Iranian myth, however, lacks the episode of freeing a young woman from the clutches of the dragon, a motif that is found in later Iranian texts and that has spread from there to Armenia (myths of Mher),<sup>32</sup> the Caucasus and Europe, mostly in the form of the medieval Christian legend of St. George.<sup>33</sup> The relationships between the dragon and the heroes can be summarized for the Germanic, Indo-Iranian, and Japanese areas as follows.

Sigurd/Siegfried Beowulf	Indra	Susa.no Wo
dragon/ "worm"/ midgard snake	dragon <i>ahi/aži</i> / snake/Nāga is slain > releases water	dragon <i>yamata.no orochi</i> is slain > fertile land
Met, etc. going berserk	Soma invigorates Indra	Sake is given to dragon, gets drunk, is killed

Just as in the Vala/Iwato myth (Witzel 2005), the dragon myth shows a close relationship between old Japanese and early Central Asian myth (c. 2000 BCE), represented by the Vedic and Old Iranian traditions. Such links are in need of further exploration. Attention so far has been focused on the relationship between Japanese and Scythian/Greek myths.

32. See the early medieval Armenian myth/epic of *David of Sassoon*.

33. For a detailed background of this tale, see *Handbuch* (Bächtold-Stäubli 1930sq. 1987) vol. 3: 647, and cf. Barber and Barber 2004. The earlier Byzantine tale of St. George killing the Dragon is attested in Germany and in England only since the 12th century.

At the other end of Eurasia, in ancient Greece, the motif is first found in the Homeric hymn 3.179 ff., where the sun deity, Phoibos Apollo, kills a female dragon at his temple of Pytho, at Crisa, below the Parnassos mountain.

... Apollo ... with his strong bow, the son of Zeus killed the bloated, great-she-dragon, ... cruel Typhaon, ... a plague among men ... until the lord Apollo, who deals death from afar, shot a strong arrow at her. Then she, rent with bitter pangs, lay drawing great gasps of breath and rolling about that place... and so she left her life, breathing forth in blood. The Phoebus Apollo boasted over her: "Now rot here upon the soil that feeds men!" ... and darkness covered her eyes.

(Evelyn-White 1914: 351)

In this version of the myth, however, nothing is said about fertilizing the earth or providing water for it. (As in several other Greek myths, early Near Eastern influence may be seen; cf. §4). We can also compare the myth of Kadmos and the dragon.

Kadmos founded castle of Kadmeia, the later Thebes. He killed a dragon, descended from Ares, with stones. He broke off the teeth of the monster and sowed them into the earth. Immediately, fully armed men arose from it, the ancestors of the Theban nobility. After an eight-year penance for having killed the dragon, Kadmos was married to Harmonia, daughter of Ares and Aphrodite; all gods attended. (In his old age both emigrated to Illyria where they turned into snakes and finally were admitted to Elysion). (see Graves 1995: 195–6; cf. 198–200).

#### 4. Eurasia

Still older is the version preserved in the Mesopotamian text *Enuma Elish*, (tablet IV) which was recited at New Year. The deities elect the god Marduk as their leader and tell him:

"Go, and cut off the life of Tiamat!"  
 He fashioned a bow, designated it as his weapon,  
 Feathered the arrow, set in the string.  
 He lifted up a mace and carried it in his right hand,  
 Slung the bow and quiver at his side,  
 Put lightening in front of him,  
 His body was filled with an ever-blazing flame.  
 He made a net to encircle Tiamat with it, marshaled the four winds  
 so that no part of her could escape ...  
 And set his face towards Tiamat who raged out of control.  
 In his lips he gripped a spell,  
 In his hand he grasped a herb to counter poison ...  
 The lord spread his net and encircled her ...  
 He shot an arrow which pierced her belly,  
 split her down the middle and slit her heart,

vanquished her and extinguished her life.  
 He threw down the corpse and stood on top of her...  
 The Lord trampled the lower part of Tiamat.  
 With his unsparing mace smashed her skull,  
 Severed the arteries of her blood,  
 And made the North wind carry it off as good news. (Dalley 1989: 249 sqq.)

The story continues, in the fashion of the Ymir-Puruṣa-Pangu myth<sup>34</sup> to explain how the world was fashioned out of her bones.

In China, a dragon myth belongs to the oldest strata of local mythology. Nüwa (Nügua),<sup>35</sup> the second of the primordial “emperors,” accomplishes the work of dragon slaying: in the beginning, the earth was still in chaos, some heroes must put it in order.

The 4 extremes and the nine provinces were dislocated... The heaven did not cover earth completely... Fire transgressed everywhere without being mastered, water accumulated without being dispersed. Beasts devoured men, rapacious birds took away the old and weak. Nügua purified the fire of the stones of all colors, killed the black dragon, ... accumulated the ashes of reeds to stop the overflowing waters... She cut the feet of the grand tortoise in order to fix the 4 extremes (quarters of the sky)... Then men could live on earth. (*Huainan zi*)<sup>36</sup>

Here the topic of establishing the oikumene is most clearly expressed and killing the dragon is one of its requirements.<sup>37</sup> Another version has, for the first time, a peaceful, beneficial dragon as habitually found in later Chinese myth. (Other texts see it as an uprising, *Liezi/Liehtzu*, ch.5: poem Tianwen/T'ang-wen).<sup>38</sup> Then, there is the myth of Kung Kung,<sup>39</sup>

34. Dissection of the primordial giant in Iceland, India, China (Yang & An 2005: 176sqq); variations are found elsewhere.

35. On her, see Yang & An 2005: 170–176; Mathieu 1989: 40 and especially p. 73 sq. In S.E. Chin. myth she escaped the great flood in a calabash. Nüwa is one of the three sovereigns of primordial age (Yang & An 2005: 170sqq), usually feminine, and associated with Fuxi, her brother, later her husband, in medieval, Tang texts. In Han time, she has a human head and a serpent body surrounding that of Fuxi. She created the human race, invented the flute.

36. Yang and An 2005: 172, Birell 1993: 69–72, 97–98, 146. For the tortoise, cf. other Eurasian and N. American myths; the black dragon = excess water; see *Huainan zi*, ch. 1 p. 3b.

37. Other texts see it as an uprising, *Liehtzu*, ch. 5: T'ang-wen.

38. E.W. Lai 1995; Yang & An 2005: 94–95.

39. Yang & An 2005: 124–126.

Gong Gong [Kung Kung, Kanghui] extended the flood for 22 years ... His son Yu emerged in the form of a horned dragon. Gun's body also transformed into a dragon at that time and thenceforth lived quietly in the deeps ... Yu led other gods to drive away Gong Gong, distributed the Growing Soil to remove most of the flood, and led the people to fashion rivers from Ying's tracks and thus channel the remaining floodwaters to the sea. (Huainanzi, ch. 6: Lanming)

As to other early Chinese dragon-slayer myths, Lai (1995) focuses on the legendary Xia/Hsia mid-dynastic anthropogonic figure of Emperor K'ung-chia. He sees the Archer Yi of the East Coastal Region as belonging to the historic Shang, whose totem is the sun-bird. The prehistoric/legendary Hsia is in the Center and its totem is the snake-fish Dragon complex.

Southern China is home to a large number of Austric peoples. In one of their myths, coming from Sichuan (Szechwan), the ancient land Ba (Pa).<sup>40</sup>

The Pa serpent is said to have a black body and a green head. It is so gigantic and greedy that it could swallow an elephant whole. Downstream east lay the Grotto Court Lake, and the Pa serpent also lurked in the waters there and did harm to many fishermen.

Archer I, the hero of the I people in the east, killed this Pa serpent in a big battle. There is a small hill by the side of Lake Grotto Court that is called the Pa Mound. It is located at the southwest of Yueh-yang, Hunan province. It is where the bones of this gigantic Pa serpent were supposed to have been piled up after Archer I had killed the monster.<sup>41</sup>

In a late, Muslim version from Yunnan, the Drought-chaser turns into a dragon:

During a long drought, the Drought-Chaser went to the sea and arrived at a crystal palace of the Sea Dragon, unlocked a thorny gate with a dragon-patterned board and entered. He found the Sea Dragon asleep, holding his rain pearl in his mouth. The Drought-Chaser grabbed the pearl, put in his own mouth, and ran as fast as he could retrace his footsteps. At that juncture, the Sea Dragon woke up. Discovering the pearl gone, he immediately gave chase. The Drought-Chaser swallowed the rain pearl and used the dragon-patterned board as a weapon. He struck the Sea Dragon's head with it and brought this monster down. Suddenly though, the Drought-Chaser himself turned into a dragon. He flew out of the crystal palace on wings, and brought down a torrential downpour that helped to end the drought.

40. The sign for Pa is a picture of a snake.

41. E.W. Lai, personal communication (Feb. 29, 2004).

The dragon here has two forms: asleep under the sea (winter) it withholds the subterranean water; awake to take to the air (spring) it brings down the rain from the clouds. The dragon board is the Son of Heaven's insignia ordering the spirits of nature about.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, in Polynesia where we do not expect any dragons (Hawai'i has no snakes or Komodo dragons), we still hear of them in the form of large lizard gods (Haw. *mo'o*, Maori *mokomoko*, *mokoroa*, Tregear 1891: 249), who also appear in many other, smaller shapes. They are prominent in the creation story, which seems superficially influenced by Christian motives (Fornander 1969). However, the very similar Maori version (Tregear 1891: 57) has old verse lines mentioning them. In this myth, we find a "fallen chief," there is the lying lizard Ilioha at the tree with the forbidden fruit of Kane (Maori *Tane*). In Fornander's Hawai'ian version, the first man (Haw. *Kumu-honua*, Maori *Ko-honua*) is formed out of earth. The Gods give him a garden in "the land that moved off," with pig, dog, *mo'o* of many sorts, and a *tapu* (taboo) tree.<sup>43</sup>

Comparison: The Eurasian dragon fight

Egypt	Mesopot.	Greece	India	Japan	China
Seth god of thunder attacks dragon of the deep, kills and dismembers him each night (Apophis) gets drunk by red beer	Marduk <new year myth!> attacks Tiamat & monsters: dismembered	Python Kadmos & the dragon	Indra dragon <i>ahi</i> / <i>aži</i> slain, dismembered  Soma invigorates Indra  [Iran/Rome: St. George/ virgin saved]	Susa.no Wo Yamata.no orochi slain, dismembered  Sake is given to dragon drunk and killed  virgin Kushinada Hime saved	Nügua Black Dragon killed

42. Interpretation by E.W. Lai, pers. comm. (February 29, 2004).

43. Cf. also the African version of the myth, with the Bassari in Togo (L. Frobenius 1924: 75–76, see Campbell 1988: 1. 1: 14).

## 5. Dragon and summer solstice

The appearance of the virgin or princess to be rescued from the Dragon by the Hero opens a wider vista that cannot be pursued here at length and will be treated in a future paper. This mytheme is the link to two widespread sets of myths.

- (1) The myths of the slaying of the dragon e.g., Susano no Wo in Japanese myth, as detailed above. This is sometimes connected with Summer Solstice and with marrying a local virgin. Examples include that of Indra slaying the dragon (Vedic India), the Thraëtaona's slaying the Avestan three-headed dragon in summer, the BMAC/Nuristani dragon, as Nāga, melting ice and snow in early summer (Witzel 2004). The Japanese version involved the (temporary) marriage of the dragon slayer to a local virgin; it is a mirror image of the myth of the release of the Sun woman from the cave (Witzel 2005).<sup>44</sup>
- (2) The myths of a (temporary) marriage with a divine nymph or "Weaver Woman" by a celestial or early human ancestor, Hunter or Cowherd. It takes place around the time of summer solstice. Examples include the Vedic Indian Purūravas and Urvaśī (R̥gveda 10.95; Witzel 1987), the Cowherd and the Weaver woman in China (July 7). Ultimately, it seems to go back to the foundational myth of the marriage of Sun and Moon, as is seen among the Kekchi Maya in Guatemala (Witzel 2005).

One could stop here and regard the dragon stories as old myths that deal with the doing away of the monsters populating the newly emerged earth. They need to be overcome as to allow life on earth (frequently, even before humans emerge). However, as indicated, a closer look at these myths reveals that they are part of a grander scheme. We begin in Greece, where we find a myth that is close to what we can detect in Vedic India in connection with another primordial myth, the creation of light (see Witzel EJVS 12–1, 2005). In this Vedic myth, the dawn is symbolized by reddish cows that are released from a cave through the onslaught of the great heroic god Indra, or Tajikara in the Iwato myth of the Jpn. Kojiki. In early Greece, the cows of Geryoneus are rescued by Herakles.

Geryoneus, a giant with three bodies, is the son of Chrysaor, son of Gorgo Medusa. He owns a great herd of cows on the island of Erytheia "redland", which is situated in the extreme West. The great hero Herakles, son of the sky God Zeus, in his 10th work, travels there, puts up his two columns at Gibraltar/Atlas, crosses

---

44. Note that the northwestern land of Izumo, viewed from the early center in Yamato (Nara area east of Osaka), is an exact mirror image of Yamato: the land and its mythology (Kojiki 1. 19–31) represents the dark, evening/night aspect of Japan (including the entrance to the netherworld). It is opposed to that of southeastern Yamato, where the Sun Goddess rules at Ise, and where her descendant, the emperor, entered from another "sunfacing" (*himuka* = Hyūga) country in Kyushu, and then resided at Asuka/Nara.

the Okeanos in a golden beaker of Apollo (which he otherwise uses every night to cross the ocean). Herakles kills the herdsmen, the giant Eurytion, the two-headed dog Orth(r)os, and finally, Geryoneus with the shot of an arrow.<sup>45</sup> He then drives back the cows to Greece (where Eurystheus offers them to Zeus' wife, Hera).<sup>46</sup>

Obviously, the cows in the west are the opposite of the Dawn cows in the Vala cave of the East (Witzel 2005). Just as in the Veda (Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 2. 440–2), the island of the cows is situated in the extreme west, inside the ocean (*Okeanos*, Ved. *Rasā*), or rather on the borderline of subterranean waters, where one can get only in the same way as the sun crosses the ocean of night (as in Egyptian myth). The subterranean situation is also stressed by the appearance of the two-headed dog that reminds, in India, of the two “four-eyed” dogs of Yama, at the gate of the netherworld. Erytheia has long been understood as the “other world” (Jpn. *Tokoyo*), as the other world or the Savaiki (Hawai'i) paradise in Polynesian myth: both lie in the western direction.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, the gaining of the cows by Herakles – who seems to be like a Greek Indra – looks like a summer solstice/evening myth, a mirror image of the Vala/Iwato myth, that is a winter solstice/morning myth (Witzel EJVS 12-1, 2005). Why should Herakles bring back the cows in the evening or at summer solstice? They are likely to disappear below the western horizon “forever”. The effect thus is the same as in the Vala/Iwato myth: restoring the cows/dawn to humankind.

In Vedic myth, the slaying of the dragon is expressively correlated with the midday pressing of the sacred drink Soma and with Summer (hot season/later, = onset of monsoon). In earlier, R̥gvedic times, when people speaking Old Indio-Aryan dialects were still residing in Afghanistan, Gandhara and the Panjab, this coincided with the snow melt in the high mountains of the Hindukush, Pamirs, and Himalaya and flooding of the rivers (Falk 1997). In the BMAC, Nuristani, and northwestern Indian myths, this is linked to the slaying of the great dragon/snake/Nāga (Witzel 2004, and forthc.) which cannot be explored here in detail.

However, a brief look will be taken at the other myth that links the Sun and Moon with Summer solstice. It comes from ancient China, and is known in Japan under the name of Tanabata, where it was introduced during the early Heian period, at

---

45. Cf. also the various myths of archers/bow shooter (Apollo, Marduk, etc.) and those in Avesta, Veda, China: 10 suns, nine shot down (note also the “10 little Indians” song?); further the Meso-American shooter myths: 3–4 suns are shot down, and the usurper, the fake sun (red Seven Macaw bird) falls from the tree, etc.; see Popol Vuh, II (Tedlock 1985: 90 sqq).

46. Note also the apples of paradise (China, Japan, Polynesia, Greece, etc.); for the Maori myth, see Tregear 1891: 56 sqq, s.v. *Hawaiki*.

47. The original blissful home of the Polynesians, \*Savaiki > Savai, Hawaiki, Hawai'i, see Tregear 1891: 56 sqq.



c. 800 A.D. The cow-herd (*K'ien-niu*, *K'ien-niu-lang*, *Niu-Lang*) and the weaver girl (*Chih-nü*), are first mentioned already in the song *Ta-tung* "great east" of the Shijing/Shih-king of the Zhou/Chou period (1027 BC.-771 BCE), and until c. 5th cent. BCE (cf. Yang & An 2005: 221).

The cow herd lives in the asterism Eagle (Altair), and the weaver girl in Vega and Lyre (formed by a triangle of a larger and two smaller stars in Vega and Lyre). The weaver girl, the daughter of Heaven (Yu Yi), weaves heavenly clothes on the eastern bank of the heavenly river, the Milky Way. Heaven allows her to marry the cowherd. But as she neglects her weaving, she is banned to the eastern shore. (Alternatively, her mother uses her hair pin to scratch a dividing line, the Milky Way). Only once per year, in the night of the 7th of the seventh month she is allowed to visit her husband (see also King-Ch'u sui-shih-ki). This, she can do across a bridge (*Feng-su ki*), made by the wings of a magpie, a symbol of conjugal fidelity.

As the Milky way is a revolving river, which becomes clear in the myth of the Taoist Jun Ping, a famous Taoist of the 1st c., who lived at Chengdu in Sichuan: a certain person entered the Milky Way on a float and returned after one year.<sup>48</sup> The weaver girl and the cowherd live on opposite banks of the Milky Way. It is part of the ocean or broad river at the end of the world and it flows around (the top of) heaven and around the earth in the course of a year (Witzel 1984); entering on it, one returns to earth in due course. The once-per-year crossing must thus carry a special meaning.

Taking a closer look at the old Chinese situation, we notice for the old center of Chinese culture at Xian in Northern China, at 1000 BC: Altair (*Alpha Aquilae*) rises at 8:45 p.m, and sets at 9:41 a.m. on June 21, 1000 BC; while Vega rises at 5:42 p.m. and sets at 10:17 a.m.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Vega rises at sunset on the NE horizon, and Altair a few

48. There was a man who lived on an island near the coast. Each year, in the 8th month, inevitably a float passed by. The man took the strange decision to observe from that float. ... He took hold there and departed. For about 10 days he observed the stars, the moon, the sun, and the whole firmament. Then, in the immeasurable darkness, he could no longer distinguish day and night. At the end of ten days (a decade), he suddenly arrived at a place resembling a village with walls. The dwellings appeared very austere. From far, he saw many weaver girls in the palace and also a man giving drink to cattle near a small island. The cowherd asked him, astonished: how did you come here? The man explained, and asked him about his origins. The cowherd told him: "when you will come to the district of Shu and visit Junping, you will learn it." He returned following the rhythm (of the stellar current). In Shu, Junping told him: "on such and such a day, month, and year, a "visitor star" (a comet or shooting star) broke into the house of the cowherd." Making the calculation of the years and the months, the man noted that it was exactly the time when he had entered the Milky Way (on the float). (Bowu zhi, ch. 10).

49. Vega is visible at 6h morning c. Nov.-August, or at 6h evening c. May-March. In evening Vega and Altair are visible ca. from June-Dec.; in the morning c. from Dec.-July. This corresponds well with the summer and winter solstices.

hours later. Both are separated by the two branches of the Milky Way. The “wings” of the magpie (*Cygnus*) are spread between the two, a little off northwards, all across the Milky Way.

Weaver women are often identified with the sun: The Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu is or has weaver girl(s); in Vedic India day (masc.) and night (fem.) are frequently described as weaving a cloth, in a complicated pattern of day and night, and Night herself is also described as cloth. Even in far off Guatemala, there is a Kekchi Maya myth which speaks of a hunter (of deer) and a weaver woman, a “king’s” daughter, who is locked into a room and emerges from there just as Amaterasu or Uṣas from the cave (Witzel 2005).

If the Chinese weaver girl represents the Sun goddess (dawn) at night, and as her representation, Vega, becomes visible in the evening around summer solstice, then the Cowherd<sup>50</sup> can well be the Chinese version of Indra/Susa.no Wo. Only, around Summer solstice, he does not break open the cave of the Sun goddess, but instead it is the sun goddess who comes to visit him. In all cultures involved she is the daughter of heaven: whether as Uṣas, the daughter of Dyaus (Vedic India), or as the Weaver woman, the daughter of Heaven (China), or the weaving daughter of a “king”(Kekchi Maya).

The Kekchi of Guatemala<sup>51</sup> tell a long story about the courtship of Sun and Moon. The future moon, a weaver woman and daughter of a “king” was shut up in room, and released by a hunter (the sun) in form of a colibri. Both escaped through the key hole, and the woman was killed by volcano fire but then reborn. The tale revolves around the marriage of the Hunter and the Weaver girl. In the end, Hunter and Weaver girl are again separated as Sun and Moon.

Winter	only India	only Japan	Kekchi Maya
sun (dawn) married or has sexual relations with her brother	marriage of Sūryā, RV10.86	Amaterasu and Susa.no Wo are siblings;	[1st part of myth] [Hunter and Weaver girl probabaly are original siblings]
(Weaver woman & cow herd in China)	Uṣas attacked by brothers (and father as antelope)	Susa.no Wo interferences with A.’s realm, attacks her (and servants) sexually; violent ascent to heaven	Hunter approaches Weaver girl; unites with her, entering her room through key hole, at night, as colibri/human, woman gets pregnant
Hunter and Weaver (Kekchi)			

(Continued)

50. Or the historically older, Meso-/Neolithic Kekchi figure of a deer hunter.

51. Bierhorst 1990: 112.

(Continued)

Summer	Indian myths	China	Kekchi
Sun woman (dawn) is married to her brother, the violent god (Susa.no Wo, Indra, cf. Cow Herd) who is assigned the lower world (or the moon)	Nymph Urvaṣī married to human descendant of gods, Purūravas	Weaver girl is married to cow herd	[2nd part of myth] Weaver girl is “married” to deer Hunter
Sun woman (Sūryā, Urvaṣī) has many previous lovers	Urvaṣī is promiscuous, like Uṣas with poets		(meets with Hunter in colibri form, at night)
Separated from S. by Milky Way N.1.36;	separated one year; meeting again at lake, in company of nymphs in form of birds	separated by Milky Way	(separated by water/ocean)
Deities are generally jealous of any sexual relation with a demi-god or human	Urvaṣī's heavenly (sexual) partners succeed in finally separating the two by lightening	she neglects her weaving; Heaven separates the two	father is “jealous”, separates the two by volcanic fire
“oldest love story”:	Purūravas roams around, madly	the two cannot meet	Hunter roams around for 2 weeks (half moon!)
(Bringing of Fire from demi-gods)	in desperation succeeds to meet her once per year.	meet once per year	meets her after “rebirth” from waters/bottles
meeting on/near ocean/water/ Milky Way	Gandharva fire (children)/ by going to heaven (RV, 10.95, st. 18); but around summer solstice, on Viṣuvat day of Gavām Ayana (“cows’ walk”) one rests on an island at the top of the sky/Milky Way near the North pole; cf. facilitating role of bird-nymphs	on July 7, crossing the Milky Way via a ford (the wings of magpie)	(crossing of waters)
regular yearly meeting (full moon in Summer?)	Purūravas and Urvaṣī meet once per year only (BŚS)	they unite for one night only	they had united for one night only; now separate as Sun and Moon

In other words, around summer solstice, the “cave opener” (Indra, Susa.no Wo, Cowherd, Kekchi hunter, etc.) and the goddess Dawn/Sun (Uşas, Amaterasu, Weaver woman, Kekchi weaver girl) meet for sexual contact, which they *do not do* at winter solstice (as is hinted at in India and Japan, Witzel 2005).

In winter, the cave is magically opened through the performance of sexual rites *outside* the cave, in order to entice the dawn (Uşas, Amaterasu) to come out. In summer, the opposite takes place. The female sun moves across the heavenly river (or water) to visit Indra (as Purūravas), the Cowherd, the Deer Hunter.<sup>52</sup>

The appearance of the myth of a temporary marriage between figures symbolizing the sun and the moon, both in Meso-America as well as in Eurasia, point to a date of the myth well before the first immigration into the Americas, by (at least) 15,000–11.5000 BCE.

In sum, the myth is a Laurasian one of the Late Paleolithic period.

It helps to shed light on the frame of mind of Stone Age humans.<sup>53</sup> In combination with other myths (Witzel 2004, 2005), the Laurasian mythology of the Late Paleolithic period is gradually emerging, and beyond that, the still earlier myths of anatomically modern humans, before they left Africa (Witzel 2005, 2006; van Binsbergen 2006; Berezkin 2002).

In sum, the approach of comparative mythology to prehistory is another pillar, next to the study of language, paleontology/genetics and archeology, in our quest to understand early humans. Collaboration in this long-ranging, complicated quest

---

52. Can this also be the situation of the Vedic Vṛṣākapi hymn RV 10.85 (Witzel 2005):

India: Indra + Indrāṇī :: Vṛṣākapi + Vṛṣākāpāyī

Japan: Ta-jikara + Amaterasu :: Susa.no Wo + Uzume.

Note also the role of the magpie as bridge and the “eagle” (*Aquila*) asterism and cf. that of the Vedic *ariklava* messenger bird in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa myth, and the role of the “gate” and the islands at this location of the Milky Way (Witzel 1984).

53. The appearance of the Rainbow Snake in Sub-Saharan Africa, Australia and South America seems to represent an earlier stage in the evolution of human mythology, that of the Gondwana type mythologies. However, its appearance in S. America, that seems to contradict the existence of the dragon motif in early Laurasian myth, may well be a remnant of earlier Gondwana traits (Witzel 2005, 2006), such as the motif of the origins of humans from trees, that is found in Africa, Australia, but also in Laurasian Taiwan/Japan and Iceland. Further, the history of South American mythologies still is, by and large, untraced (Bierhorst 1988: 14 sqq), similar to that of the spread of S. American language families (see W. Davey, *MT* X: 162–171). Note also the appearance of the *Ogre* in African mythology, van Binsbergen 2006: 336.

is eagerly sought by the aforementioned and an emerging international group of scholars.<sup>54</sup>

## References

- Afghanistan, une histoire millénaire*. Paris: Editions de la Réunion des Musées nationaux 2002.
- Aston, W.G. 1972 [1896]. *Nihongi. Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*. Rutland: Tuttle.
- Bächtold-Stäubli, H. & Hoffmann-Krayer E. 1987 [1930]. *Handbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*. Vol. 2, 364–409. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Barber, E.W. & Barber, P.T. 2004. *When They Severed Earth from Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Beckwith, C.I. 2004. *Koguryo, The Language of Japan's Continental Relatives*. Leiden: Brill.
- Beckwith, M. 1940. *Hawaiian Myth*. New Haven: Yale.
- Benveniste, E. & Renou, L. 1934. *Vrtra et Vrthragna. Etude de mythologie indo-iranienne*. Paris.
- Berezkin, Y. *Dwarfs and Cranes. Baltic Finnish Mythologies in Eurasian and American Perspective. 70 years after V. Toivonen*. Paper presented at a conference at Tartu 2002.
- Binsbergen, W. van. 2003. "Rupture and fusion in the approach to myth. Situating myth analysis between philosophy, poetics, and long-range historical reconstruction, with an application to the ancient and world-wide mythical complex of leopard-skin symbolism. Paper at the Conference 'Myth and the disciplines' at Leiden, Dec. 12, 2003 [http://www.shikanda.net/ancient\\_models/myth%20mineke%20defdefdef.pdf](http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/myth%20mineke%20defdefdef.pdf)
- Binsbergen, W. van. 2006. "Mythological Archaeology. Situating sub-Saharan African cosmogonic myths within a long-range intercontinental comparative perspective." *Proceedings of the Pre-Symposium of RHIN and 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Round Table*, Ed. by T. Osada, 319–349. Published by the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RHIN), Kyoto, Japan. [cf. <http://www.shikanda.net/topicalities/kyoto/kyoto.htm>]
- Bierhorst, J. 1986. *The Mythology of North America*. New York: William Morrow.
- Bierhorst, J. 1990. *The mythology of Mexico and Central America*. New York: William Morrow.
- Bierhorst, J. 1988. *The Mythology of South America*. New York: William Morrow.
- Birrell, A. 1993. *Chinese Mythology. An Introduction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Blust, R. 2000. "Origins of Dragons." *Anthropos* 95. 519–536.
- Campbell, Joseph. 1988. *Historical Atlas of World Mythology. Vol. I. The way of the animal powers. Part 1: Mythologies of the primitive hunter and gatherers*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Colarusso, J., Ed. 2002. *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dalley, S. 1989. *Myths from Mesopotamia. Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---

54. An Association for Comparative Mythology (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/compmyth>) was founded during the recent Beijing Conference on Comp. Myth., sponsored by Harvard and Peking Universities (<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/BeijingProgram.pdf>); cf. also the three year Project of the Harvard Asia Center (2003–6) <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/%7Esanskrit/myth.html>; see now: <http://compmyth>.

- Doty, W.G. 1986. *Mythography*. Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama Press.
- Doty, W.G. 2000. *Mythography : the study of myths and rituals* (2nd Ed.). Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press 2000.
- Evelyn-White, H.G. 1977 [1914]. *Hesiod. The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Falk, H. 1997. "The purpose of Ṛgvedic ritual." *Inside the texts, Beyond the Texts. New Approaches to the Study of the Vedas*, Ed. by M. Witzel, 67–88. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Oriental Series, Opera Minora.
- Feldman, Burton & Robert D. Richardson. 1972. *The Rise of modern Mythology 1680–1860*. Indiana University Press.
- Fontenrose, J. 1980 [1959]. *Python*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fornander, A. 1879–1885. *An Account of the Polynesian Race; Its origins and Migrations, and the ancient history of the Hawaiian people to the times of Kamehameha I.*, 3 vols. London: Trubner. [Repr. Rutland: Tuttle 1969].
- Forssman, B. 1968. "Apaoša, der Gegner des Tištriia." *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung (KZ)* 82. 37–61.
- Francfort, P.-H. 1994. "The Central Asian dimension of the symbolic system in Bactria and Margiana." *Antiquity* 68. 406–418.
- Frobenius, L. 1924. *Volksdichtungen aus Oberguinea, Vol. 1, Fabuleien dreier Völker*. Jena: Diederichs.
- Graves, R. 1955. *The Greek Myths*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Gusinde, M. 1931. *Die Feuerland-Indianer: Ergebnisse meiner 4 Forschungsreisen in den Jahren 1918 bis 1924, unternommen im Auftrag des Ministerio de Instruccion Publica de Chile*. 3 Vols. [Vol. 1. *Die Selk'Nam*] Mödling: Verlag Sankt Gabriel.
- Handbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, see: Bächtold-Stäubli 1987 [1930].
- Ivanov, V.V. & Toporov, V.N. 1970. "Le mythe indo-européen du dieu de l'orage poursuivant le serpent. Réconstruction du schéma." *Echanges et Communications. Mélanges C. Lévi-Strauss*. Paris: Mouton.
- Ivanov, V.V. & Toporov, V.N. 1974. *Issledovaniie v oblasti slavianskikh drevnostei*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Katičić, R. 2001. *Auf den Spuren sakraler Dichtung des slawischen und des baltischen Heidentums*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Lai, E.W. 1995. "Unmasking the Filial Sage-King Shun. Oedipus at Anyang." *History of Religions* 35. 163–185.
- Lubotsky, A. 2001. "The Indo-Iranian Substratum." *Early Contacts between Uralic and Indo-European: Linguistic and Archaeological Considerations*, Ed. by Chr. Carpelan, A. Parpola, P. Koskikallio, 301–317. Helsinki, Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura.
- Mathieu, R. 1989. *Anthologie des mythes et légendes de la Chine ancienne*. Paris.
- Matsumura, K. 2005. "Myth Theories and War." Presentation at the XIXth World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), Tokyo, March 2005.
- Oberlies, Th. 2000. "Pūṣans Zahnlücken und Hermes' Vorliebe für Backwerk: Ererbte Strukturen des Pantheons der ṛgvedischen Religion." *Indoarisch, Iranisch, und die Indogermanistik, Arbeitstagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft 1997 in Erlangen*, Ed. by B. Forssman & R. Plath, 369–391. Wiesbaden: L. Reichert.
- Philippi, D.L. 1968. *Kojiki. Translated with an Introduction and Notes*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

- Puhvel, J. 1987. *Comparative Mythology*. Baltimore/London: John Hopkins Press.
- Schmidt, Hanns-Peter. 1963. "Die Kobra im Rgveda". *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Sprachforschung (KZ)* 78. 296–304.
- Schmidt, Hanns-Peter. 1980. "On Birds and Dogs and Bats." *Persica* IX. 1–85 and plates I–XI.
- Shishlina, N. & Hiebert, F.T. 1998. "The Steppe and the Sown: Interaction between Bronze Age Eurasian Nomads and Agriculturalists. *The Bronze Age And Early Iron Age Peoples of Eastern Central Asia*, Ed. by V. Mair, 222–237. JIES Monograph 26, Washington/Philadelphia: The Institute for the Study of Man/The University of Pennsylvania Museum Publications.
- Smith, G.E. 1919. *The Evolution of the Dragon*. London.
- Sullivan, L.E. 1988. *Icanchu's Drum. An Orientation in Meaning in South American Religions*. New York: Macmillan.
- Tedlock, D. 1985. *Popol Vuh. The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Thompson, S. 1932–36. *Motif Index of folk-literature. A classification of narrative elements in folk-tales, ballads, myths, fables, mediaeval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jest-books, and local legends*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press. [2nd Ed. 1966; computer file, Blomington: Indiana University Press/Clayton: IntelLex corp. 1993].
- Watkins, Calvert. 1995. *How to kill a dragon: aspects of Indo-European poetics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wilbert, J. 1975. *Folk Literature of the Selknam Indians*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wilbert, J. & Simoneau, K. 1987. *Folk Literature of the Nivaklé Indians*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Witzel, M. 1984. "Sur le chemin du ciel." *Bulletin des Etudes indiennes* 2.213–279. <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/CheminDuCiel.pdf>
- Witzel, M. 1990. "Kumano kara Woruga made." *Zinbun* 36.4–5. <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/%7Ewitzel/Zinbun.htm>
- Witzel, M. 1997. "Saramā and the Paṇis. Origins of Prosimetric Exchange in Archaic India." *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, Ed. by J. Harris & K. Reichl, 397–409. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.
- Witzel, M. 2000. "The Home of the Aryans." *Anusantatyai. Fs. für Johanna Narten zum 70. Geburtstag* (Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft, Beihefte NF 19), Ed. by A. Hintze & E. Tichy, 283–338. Dettelbach: J.H. Röhl. <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/AryanHome.pdf>
- Witzel, M. 2001. "Comparison and Reconstruction: Language and Mythology." *Mother Tongue* 6. 45–62. [http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/%7Ewitzel/Comp\\_Myth.pdf](http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/%7Ewitzel/Comp_Myth.pdf)
- Witzel, M. 2003. *Linguistic Evidence for Cultural Exchange in Prehistoric Western Central Asia*. Philadelphia: Sino-Platonic Papers 129. 1–70.
- Witzel, M. 2004. "The Rgvedic Religious System and its Central Asian and Hindukush Antecedents." *The Vedas: Texts, Language and Ritual*, Ed. by A. Griffiths & J.E.M. Houben, 581–636. Groningen: Forsten.
- Witzel, M. 2005a. "Vala and Iwato. The Myth of the Hidden Sun in India, Japan and beyond." *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies (EJVS)* 12: 1.1–69 [http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/80/~indst206/Background\\_Information/Vala\\_Iwato.pdf](http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/80/~indst206/Background_Information/Vala_Iwato.pdf)
- Witzel, M. 2005b. "Out of Africa: The journey of the oldest tales of humankind." *Generalized Sciences of Humanity services, Vol I*. Tokyo, research Institute for languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa 2006:21–26.

- Witzel, M. 2005c. "Slaying the Dragon in Eurasia." [Longer version of the present paper, including aspects of the summer solstices]. 2<sup>nd</sup> Indology conference at Nanhua University, Dalin, Chiyi, Taiwan, Oct. 2005.
- Witzel, M. 2006. "Creation myths." *Proceedings of the Pre-Symposium of RHIN and 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Round Table*, Ed. by T. Osada, 284–318. Kyoto: Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RHIN).
- Witzel, M. (forthcoming). *Origins and Dispersal of our First Mythologies*. [Book in preparation] (working title)
- Yang, L., D. An, with J. Turner. 2005. *Handbook of Chinese Mythology*. Handbooks of World Mythology. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC Clío.



# Trombetti

## The forefather of Indo-Pacific

Jonathan Morris

São Paulo, Brazil

The work of the Italian linguists Alfredo Trombetti and Riccardo Gatti on their hypothesis of genetic relationship between the languages of the Andaman Islands, Papua New Guinea, Australia, Tasmania, and the Dravidian languages is discussed in detail. It is shown that Trombetti and Gatti had formulated a coherent precursor of the “Indo-Pacific” hypothesis (Greenberg 1971) by 1906.

*I would like to begin by expressing a few words of thanks to Hal Fleming for his generous support. In our current era of academic hyperspecialisation, creating and sustaining an open forum such as Mother Tongue over two decades is a rare achievement in itself, but is made even rarer by Hal’s enthusiasm for discussing and developing ideas, my work being a case in point, since he was the one who insisted on my developing a casual observation into an article on Trombetti’s views on Indo-Pacific. Since only half-a-dozen of the 800-odd pages of his major work Glottologia (Trombetti 1923) deal with the subject (see Morris 2006), this is no easy task. These few pages nevertheless contain many references to another earlier work by Riccardo Gatti (1906–1909) with two introductory essays by Trombetti himself, showing that the latter figure was closely involved with the project. Gatti merely trawled through the existing vocabularies of the day (E.M. Curr for Australia, Ray for British New Guinea, Schmidt for German New Guinea and Portman for the Andaman Islands) looking for cognates, but found so many that only a small fraction can be presented here. I have thus chosen to concentrate on his Andamanese data, both on grounds of relative completeness and because it demonstrates that Trombetti’s belief in an intimate genetic relationship between the languages of the Andaman Islands, Papua New Guinea and Australia/Tasmania and the Dravidian languages was solidly data driven. Trombetti’s comments also show that he had formulated a coherent precursor of the “Indo-Pacific” hypothesis by 1906.*

In my review of Trombetti (Morris 2006), I attempted to dispel the popular caricature that he had fallen into disgrace by espousing a single origin of language, as well as to introduce a more nuanced portrayal of him as an outstandingly gifted natural linguist who rose from the most modest circumstances to hold a chair at the university of Bologna, receiving official recognition until his death in 1929.